



MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

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TENNESSEE'S FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM TOUTED ONE OF BEST IN THE NATION *STATE EARNS PERFORMANCE BONUS FOR GETTING BENEFITS TO NEEDY CITIZENS*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The Tennessee Department of Human Services this week was recognized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for having one of the nation's top Food Stamp programs. Food Stamps, now called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (or SNAP), help low-income families put food on the table each month. Tennessee was cited as giving its eligible citizens the best access to the program and earned the top performance award of \$3.3 million.

"This award shows that Tennessee is a leader in delivering the benefits that our citizens need in a timely and efficient manner," said Governor Phil Bredesen. "It is imperative that Tennesseans have easy access to programs that can provide assistance, especially during these tough economic times. I'm proud that the Department of Human Services is being recognized for delivering this vital food assistance program to our citizens."

DHS has offices in every county of the state where citizens can apply for the program. Nashville and Memphis have "roving caseworkers" who target hard-to-reach clients, including senior citizens. DHS also has an on-line application where potentially eligible clients can apply for the program via the Internet. Last month, more than 7,700 applications were filed on-line. Tennessee has enrolled 75 percent of its eligible population in the program. This is the fourth year in a row Tennessee has received the award.

"The Department and our partners across the state are working hard every day to ensure that eligible families and individuals receive these critical benefits quickly and easily," said Human Services Commissioner Gina Lodge. "We are pleased that the USDA is recognizing these efforts, and we will use these dollars to improve our program."

Food Stamp benefits are 100 percent federally funded through the USDA and administered by the Department of Human Services. Nearly \$155 million in Food Stamp benefits were issued in Tennessee in August. There are currently 548,000 households, or 1.15 million individuals, enrolled in the program statewide. The average Food Stamp household size in Tennessee is 2.2 persons, and the average monthly benefit is \$292. Nationally, more than 35 million citizens are served each month.

For more information on the Food Stamp program and to view a county by county breakdown of Food Stamp participation and issuance, visit the Department of Human Services website at:

http://state.tn.us/humanserv/adfam/fs_stats.html

Tennesseans can also find out what other state assistance programs they might be eligible for by checking out the FindHelpTN website at: <http://www.tennesseeanytime.org/findhelptn/>

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